

# TINSELTOWN: HOORAY FOR BOLLYWOOD

Flush Indian media companies are partnering with the U.S. film industry at a time of belt-tightening in L.A.

in its plants—technology that turned out to be flawed.

Agency staff have long wanted to put in place a system that prevents food crises before they happen. But there are no resources for such an effort. And when the agency proposed new safety regulations on produce last year, the Bush Administration nixed the request.

## BEYOND INSPECTIONS

The FDA is still trying to get more support and to make the system work better. Dr. David W. K. Acheson, associate commissioner for foods, is spearheading a new plan that would allow the FDA to inspect certain overseas manufacturers and force foreign firms to take more responsibility for safety. It would better assess specific threats from certain foods (and foods from manufacturers and nations) rather than, say, lumping all seafood together as uniformly risky and giving it all equal scrutiny. Such sophisticated methods are crucial. "We can't inspect our way out of this problem," says Acheson.

The plan is written, and Acheson has been trying to persuade Congress to fund it. With the growing support from industry and consumer groups, Congress may finally act. The proposed \$275 million boost likely won't happen before fiscal 2009. And it will still fall short of the budget doubling over five years recommended by the FDA's Science Board, an advisory group. The FDA is used to that, of course. "We accept that we will come up short of where we would like to be," says Acheson. But even a small boost would strengthen the front lines in the battle to ensure America's food supply is safe. **BW**



Shyamalan on the set of *The Happening*, which was backed by a Mumbai company

deals to develop and finance films with production companies headed by actors Tom Hanks, Jim Car-

rey, Brad Pitt, and others. That's part of the company's \$1 billion bankroll for films over the next two years.

The Indian spending spree (driven in part by the appreciation of the rupee vs. the dollar) is timely, given the U.S. credit crunch. "Hollywood is turning to places like the Middle East and India because Wall Street is finding it difficult to get deals done," says Stephen Prough, co-founder of Los Angeles investment bank Salem Partners.

American studios, meanwhile, want a piece of India's fast-growing \$2.1 billion a year film industry. Walt Disney took a 32% stake in UTV, while Sony last year signed a three-film deal to make Bollywood flicks with Mumbai's Eros International studio. "India is a country with a large middle class driving a tremendous amount of consumption," says Jon Feltheimer, CEO of independent studio Lionsgate Entertainment, which also has a tieup with Eros.

## FAT RETURNS

For Bollywood producers, the strategy is twofold: Finance films that might generate fat returns while hopefully reaping even more revenues distributing the content back home. UTV Managing Director Ronnie Screwvala, who wants to secure American programming for a Hindi-dubbed cable-TV channel, is planning to make films with Will Smith's Overbrook Entertainment production company. For now, that's getting Bollywood producers the red carpet treatment in Hollywood. **BW** — With Nandini Lakshman in Mumbai

By Ronald Grover

If you're an aspiring director in India, one shortcut to Hollywood can open up if you gain a spot on a TV show called *Gateway*. That's an Indian reality program in which filmmakers compete for a shot at working on a movie in Tinseltown. For already established Bollywood film types, there's a more direct approach these days: Just throw down some serious rupees.

A wave of cash-flush Indian media companies are now financing costly Hollywood fare. The latest: Mumbai-based UTV Software Communications is shouldering half the \$57 million budget for *The Happening*, an apocalyptic 20th Century Fox film directed by M. Night Shyamalan of *The Sixth Sense* fame, opening on June 13.

The Hollywood-India tie may have some staying power. On May 18, India's Reliance Big Entertainment signed

## LINKS

On June 11, [NewScientist.com](http://NewScientist.com) suggested that salmonella outbreaks are frequently traced to produce because it is "packaged and shipped in centralized locations, so instead of a localized outbreak, we see a nationwide or even worldwide epidemic." Scientists and inspectors are increasingly looking at produce as a salmonella source, says the site.

